

2003 SHAREHOLDERS REPORT

The Lake Superior Area DNR wildlife management team has a lot going on in your area. Through this year-end newsletter we would like to share some information with you about the things we have been working on and invite you to participate in enjoying and managing Wisconsin's wildlife resources.

THE DNR WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT TEAM

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A New Lease

The Douglas County Wildlife Management Area (DCWMA) was established in 1948 when the State leased 2,480 acres from Douglas County (DC). But the area's history as a wildlife area dates back to at least 1925 when the Northern States Amateur Field Trial Association (NSAFTA) conducted its first dog trial on the area known as the 'Bird Sanctuary'. Since 1937 the NSAFTA has conducted the U.S. Chicken Championship here annually making it one of the longest running dog trials in North America.

In 1953 the State and DC signed a 50-year lease for 2,760 acres. During the course of the lease additional land was added to the lease, and DNR purchased 994 acres making it about 4,000-acres.

In 2003 when the DNR and DC began discussions about a new lease some people suggested and promoted different uses for the County land. Upon learning this, many people who use, enjoy, and valued the natural resources of the area joined together to support and advocate for the continued existence of the DCWMA. Their support was critical in helping the DNR and DC reach a new 25-year lease agreement for 3,011 acres.



Many of these people want to help in management and stewardship of the DCWMA to assure the property's continued existence for many years to come. To achieve this they formed the 'Friends of the Bird Sanctuary' organization. To learn more about this group and for membership information see their Website at www.fotbs.org.

Three major factors: **fire, soils, and topography** dominate the development and maintenance of the pine barrens community. Intensive control of fire has virtually eliminated the large, frequent fires that once naturally occurred in the pine barrens community. In the absence of fire natural plant succession coupled with an intensive tree-planting program has turned almost all of Wisconsin's pine barrens into forest.

Historically pine barrens covered about 2,340,000 acres in Wisconsin. Today there is less than 1% of the original pine barrens community remaining in Wisconsin. Most of the remaining pine barrens habitat left in NW Wisconsin is found on four public wildlife management areas including the DCWMA where prescribed fire is used to maintain this rare habitat type.

2003 Bear Season and 2004 Preview

The 2003 bear season was a very successful one with hunters achieving harvests slightly above prescribed levels in all management zones. The statewide harvest goal was 2,380 bears and the preliminary harvest totaled 2,845.

The harvest goal for 2004 will be 2,500 bears statewide with 4,740 permits available. While harvest objective are slightly higher for 2004 statewide, populations in Zone A1 are at the desired long-term management goal and harvest objectives have been reduced to reflect the reduction in this population over the past 5-years of high harvests. There will be a total of 1,075 permits available for Zone A1 and 1,630 in Zone A in 2004. Hunting applications are due the Friday nearest January 15 annually.

New for 2004

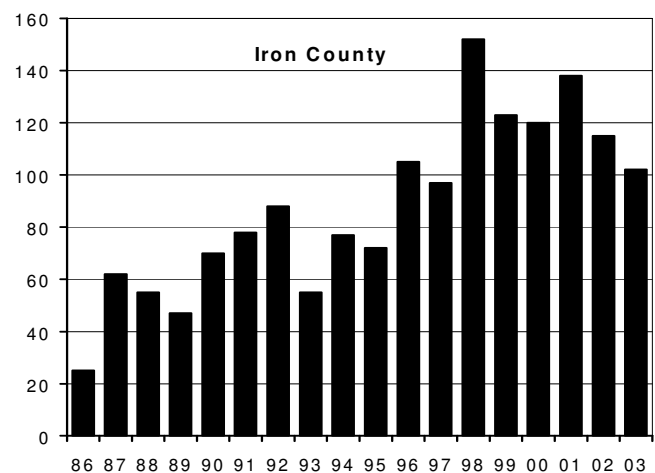
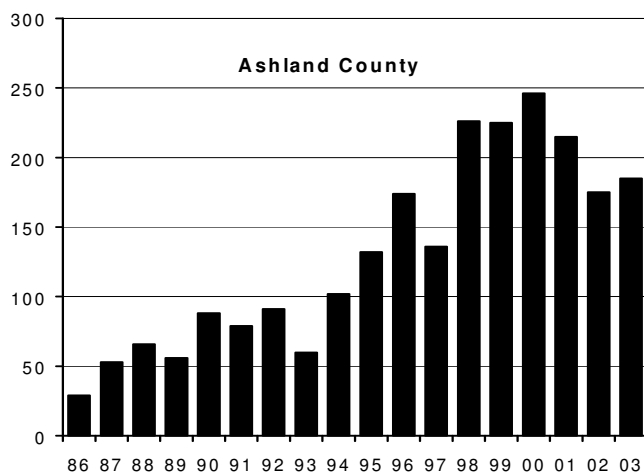
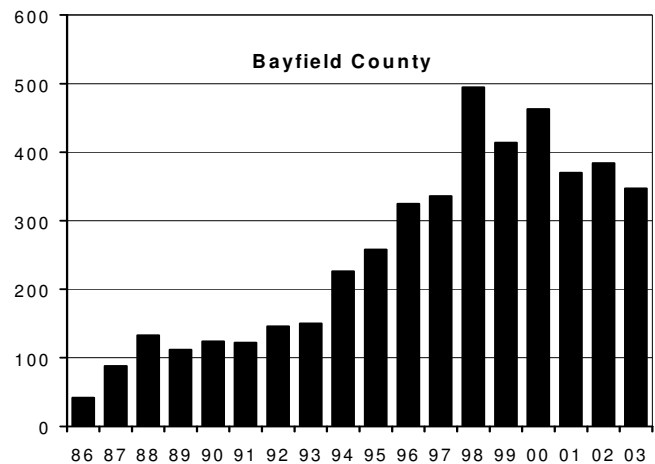
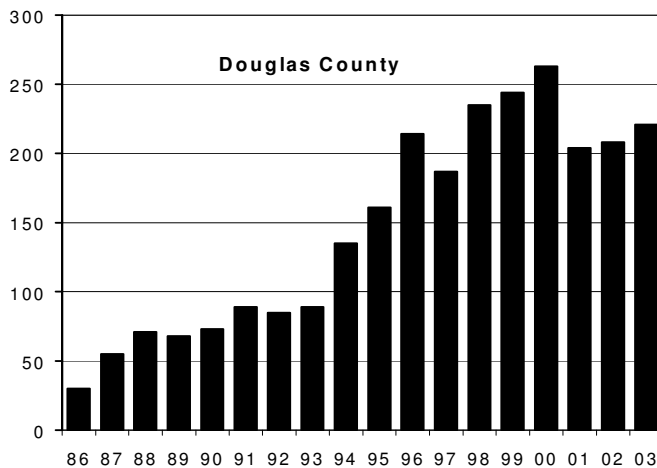
Beginning in 2004 holders of class A bear licenses may transfer their permit to first-time bear hunters ages 12 to 17. The transfer is intended will allow young hunters an opportunity to hunt bear without requiring them to wait the 5-7 years it normally takes to obtain a permit. Applications for transfer will be made available later this year and will have a deadline prior to the start of the bear hunting season.

2004 Hunting Season Dates (Zones A and A1)

September 8-14: Bait and other methods not including use of dogs.

Sept. 15 - Oct. 5: All methods

Oct. 6-12: Hunting with the aid of hounds only.



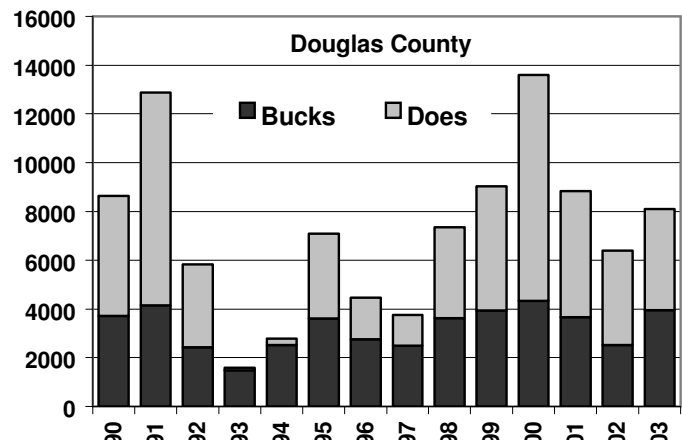
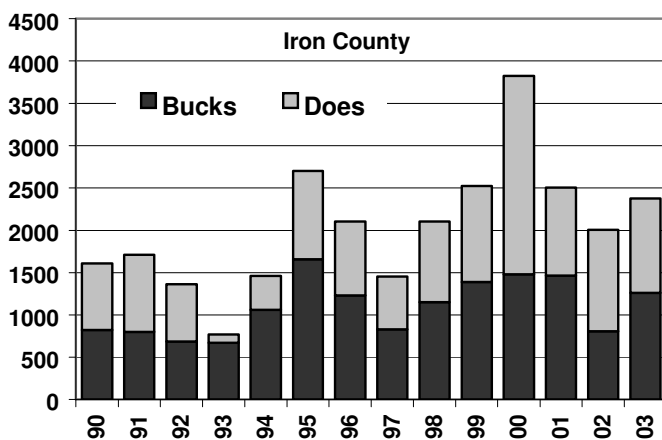
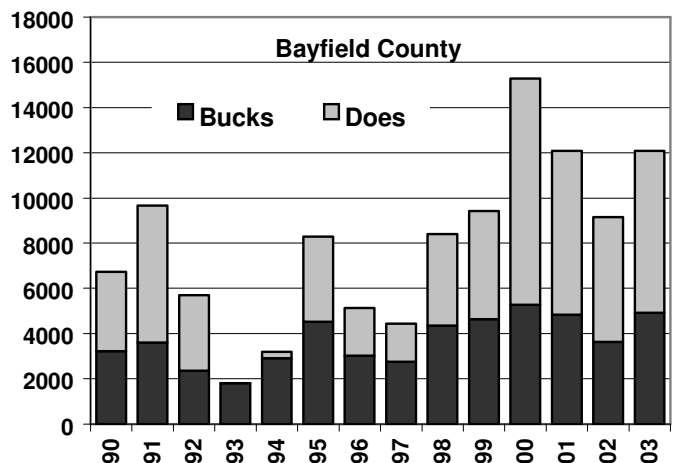
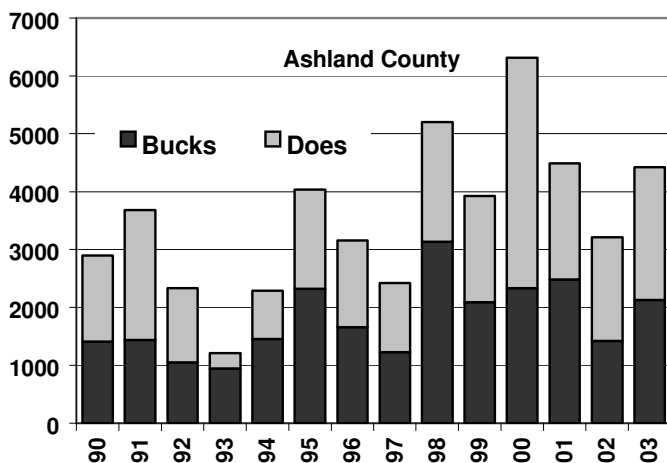
The 2003 Deer Seasons

For many people who like to see deer and like to hunt deer it was a 'return to normal' year. The discovery of CWD in SW Wisconsin in February 2002 created questions, concerns, and anxiety for many people. It brought about many changes in how we view, manage, and utilize our deer resource. Last year human health concerns about the consumption of venison caused some people to not 'go hunting' and for others it decreased their interest in harvesting deer. In 2002 the statewide sale of deer hunting licenses was down about 10% from previous years. The ban on baiting and feeding deer also contributed to fewer hunters, reduced hunting effort, and a reduced deer harvest, especially for the archery seasons.

In 2003 hunting participation, as measured in the number of licenses sold and the number of deer harvested, returned to levels similar to what they were prior to the discovery of CWD. The number of deer harvested in our counties in both the archery and gun seasons (see below harvest charts) was similar to the 2001 seasons.

This was the second year for a number of hunting season changes that were implemented as a result of the 'Deer Management for 2000 and Beyond' process. These included: a 10-day muzzleloader season; the late archery season beginning the day after the end of the 9-day gun season and continuing until January 3rd annually; longer seasons for metropolitan units; and the creation of a metropolitan unit 1M covering the City of Superior. These changes have been popular with more people hunting in these longer seasons resulting more deer are being harvested.

Another result of the 'Deer Management for 2000 and Beyond' process which will be implemented in 2004 is the Earn-A-Buck (EAB) requirement. Units that were T-zone units in 2002 and 2003 and meet the T-zone requirement for 2004 will be EAB units. In these units hunters will be required to harvest an antlerless deer before they can harvest a buck. Units where this requirement will likely be in effect for the 2004 seasons include 3, 4, 5, 6, 13, 14, 29A, and 78.



Let's Talk Turkey

Can wild turkeys survive the winter extremes of far northern Wisconsin? We're about to find out. With the encouragement, support and fund-raising efforts of two local National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf) Chapters, the Department is planning to release up to 160 wild turkeys in six locations throughout Bayfield and Douglas Counties in the winter of 2004.

A couple years ago, members of the Snowbelt Longbeard and the Gitchee Gumme chapters of the NWTf, requested the DNR consider introducing wild turkeys in the area. At that time, biologists did not support the proposal, as traditional knowledge of turkey biology indicated that turkeys are unable to survive in areas where snow typically exceeds 10 inches in depth for extended periods of time. However, a recent workshop sponsored by NWTf and the Minnesota DNR brought together researchers from six northern states and Canada, to share information regarding northern turkey populations and their geographic and climatological limitations. This research showed that much of the traditional knowledge about limitations of wild turkeys is unfounded. In particular, wild turkeys populations can and have survived the most severe winter conditions, as long as an accessible food source is available. Also surprising, wild turkeys appear much more adaptable to different food sources than once believed.

Based on this new information, Department biologists are coordinating a one time "experimental" release in Bayfield and Douglas Counties. Three of the sites are in sandy soil pine barren type habitats near river corridors, while the other three are located on private farms in the agricultural region of Bayfield County. These sites were chosen as they are similar to habitats where wild turkeys are well established elsewhere in the state. If these releases are successful, the turkey

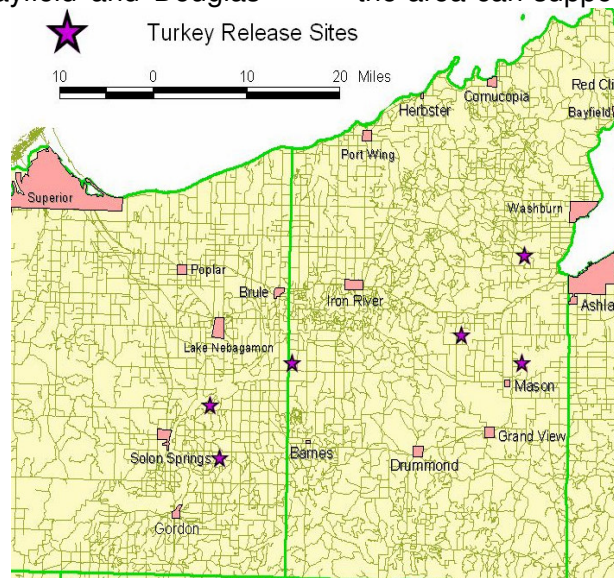
population should increase and expand toward other released populations, thereby populating suitable habitat throughout Bayfield, Douglas and Ashland Counties.

The last release of wild turkeys in the state occurred in Langlade and Lincoln Counties in 1998-99, which were also once thought to provide unsuitable habitat and winter weather conditions. A similar number of birds were released in several sites in those counties, and within a few years the population has grown and expanded throughout both counties. The birds have done so well, that the Department intends to capture the turkeys for the Bayfield and Douglas County releases from those counties.

The local releases are planned to occur sometime in March. Timing depends on trapping conditions in Langlade and Lincoln Counties. Snow cover is needed to facilitate trapping turkeys. Biologists are hoping there will be good snow cover at the trap sites as late into the winter as possible. Research shows that birds released into a new area, have much greater first year survival when released late in the winter, than when released during early or mid-winter. A high percentage of first year survival is believed to be critical to ensure future population growth.

Success of this introduction is not guaranteed. The northern limits of wild turkeys are not known. Even though the best release sites have been selected, only the turkeys themselves can tell us if the area can support them. With the assistance

and hard work of the local NWTf chapters, and the financial support of several sportsman groups, businesses, and private supporters, as well as the generosity and interest of several landowners, the Department is making its best attempt at establishing a wild turkey population in the area. Time will tell.



Wildlife Internship Program

About 28 years ago the DNR and the University of Wisconsin began a natural resources internship program. Purposes of this program were to give college students majoring in natural resources programs 'hands-on' learning experiences and to provide the DNR with summer help. Many of our current DNR biologists got their first work experience as student interns. Internships are usually for a 12-week period during the summer. Unfortunately, due to budget limitations the internship program was terminated for 2004.

Interns usually assist in conducting a wide variety of routine natural resources management work at their assigned work location. Some interns are assigned to conduct special work assignments or projects. Special projects that wildlife interns at Mercer have conducted over the years include frog and salamander surveys; eagle, osprey, and loon studies; educational projects; and forest openings and tree plantings evaluations.

In 2003 two interns worked on the Iron and Ashland County Forests. Eric Kroening, a junior at UW Stevens Point, worked on the Penokee Biological Reserve (PBR) portion of the Iron



County Forest (ICF). Jennifer Malarchik, a senior at Northland College, Ashland, participated in the state wide small mammal atlas project, conducting surveys on the ICF and Ashland County Forest (ACF). These are the types of special projects that would not be accomplished

without the help of interns.

The PBR is approximately 1,500 acres of mostly older northern hardwood forest that has been designated as a 'no cut' area within the ICF. Steep topography and difficult access has kept this area from being heavily harvested in the past. The DNR Natural Heritage program has identified this area

as potentially harboring rare plant and animal species with 18 and 5 'target' species respectively. Eric was able to identify several small populations of Braun's holly fern, Maidenhair spleenwort, Fragrant fern, and White mandarin. Locations of these plants were provided to the ICF and the DNR's Natural Heritage program. Eric also found breeding Swainson thrushes, Black-throated green warblers, and Golden-winged warblers.

This work resulted in the recommendation to extend the PBR's boundary slightly to include a traditional goshawk nest territory and to connect the protected area to Weber Lake. Eric surveyed the entire project boundary with a global positioning unit (GPS) and also marked the locations of the rare plant and geological features. This information is now part of the ICF's database.



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Jennifer was part of the DNR's Integrated Science Services' pilot year statewide small mammal atlas project. The purpose of the "Atlas" project is to document the presence of breeding populations of small mammals, often using county boundaries as the smallest geographic unit being sampled. Her project started with a list of "target species": species that should be present, but that had not been documented.

Jennifer trapped, with often up to 200 traps, in specific habitat types that would be expected to contain the target species. She also recorded visual records of mammals for which there are no established surveys for, such as porcupines. On the ICF she was able to document northern short-tailed shrew, arctic shrew, pygmy shrew, masked shrew, water shrew, red-backed voles, meadow jumping mouse, deer mice, and least chipmunks. On the ACF she caught most of the more common small mammal species and 2 southern bog lemmings, a very uncommon targeted species. Several specimens are awaiting confirmation, like a possible woodland jumping mouse.

Ashland Terns Get a New Home

In the fall of 2002 a new island was built for common terns in Ashland. Common terns, a Wisconsin endangered species, are no longer common in Wisconsin. The Ashland colony is one of only two common tern nesting colonies found in the entire Lake Superior basin. The other colony is located on Interstate Island in the St. Louis River estuary.



The new island is slightly larger than the previous island. Metal framing was placed inside of the old dock footings, the walls were built with oak planking, and the inside filled with sand. The walls were covered with metal flashing to make it difficult for mink to gain access to the tern nests. In recent years mink have been a significant predator of tern eggs and

chicks.

Common terns are a ground nesting colonial waterbird. Their main food sources are small fish found near the surface of water, primarily emerald (lake) and spottail shiners. They have nested for many years at the end of an old dock in Chequamegon Bay. The wooden walls of this artificial island were deteriorating; the island was eroding into the lake. With grant funding from the US Environmental Protection Agency Great Lakes National Program Office and with substantial help from the Bad River Department of Natural Resources a new island was built immediately south of the former island.

When the terns returned in the spring of 2003 they found a new nesting island ready for them! They immediately accepted this new island as 'their home'. There was a slight increase in the number of nesting pairs using the new island this year with about 90 pairs of terns nesting. Production of youth this year was one of the highest ever observed with nearly 2 young fledged per nest.

This new nesting island should assure that common terns remain a part of Chequamegon Bay area for many years to come; and we may once again be able to consider them common.

New Water Control Structure for the Little Turtle Flowage

The Little Turtle Flowage Wildlife Area on the Iron County Forest (ICF), was created in 1970 when an earthen dam was built across the Little Turtle River creating a 260-acre flowage. The original water control structure had an expected life of 25 years and could no longer be opened to allow the spring runoff to move quickly enough to keep water level from rising to unacceptable levels.

Funding for the project was secured from the State Waterfowl Stamp fund, Ducks Unlimited Marsh program, and the ICF Dime-An-Acre wildlife habitat grant program. The Iron County Highway Department and ICF Department cooperated in installing the 12-foot high, 60-foot long water control structure. First, the pool was drained as low as possible. The old structure was dug out, the new structure installed and the dike restored with new fill. Of course, while this work was being done the Little Turtle River was trying to re-fill the

pool with the additional help of some rain on the second day of the project. It was only with the expert effort of the Iron County crew that everything was completed properly.

The work was timed to occur after the young waterfowl including a family of young trumpeter swans were old enough to move to other suitable habitat. The swans actually stayed around and watched the construction! The aquatic vegetation including a wild rice bed could tolerate several days of moist but not totally dry conditions.

The new water control structure will allow water levels to be manipulated to provide a balance of submergent and emergent vegetation and open water habitats. This diversity of habitat will promote a wide variety of migratory and resident wildlife species such as black terns, osprey, eagles, wood ducks, and hooded mergansers.

Superior Deer

The City of Superior, like many urban areas across Wisconsin, has a large deer population. The deer population has exceeded the social carrying capacity: there are more deer in the City than most of the public wants, more than they are willing to tolerate.

The City of Superior formed 'The Deer Committee' after a deer-airplane collision and several near collisions at the City's Airport; and because of numerous other concerns raised by citizens about deer. The committee developed a 'Deer Management Plan' for the City that was approved by the City Council in 2002. One of the action items in the plan was to reduce deer populations in selected areas in the City. With substantial input from the public the Deer Committee identified, and the City Council approved, five hot spot areas in the City for deer herd reduction. Due to human safety concerns archery deer hunting by the general public is not allowed in these hot spot areas.



Trained and supervised volunteer archery hunters implemented deer herd reduction hunts from late summer through December. These volunteers

removed 70 deer from the five hot spots areas. Harvested deer were given to people who had previously signed up to receive deer from the herd reduction hunts. These certified volunteer archery hunters, working under carefully planned and controlled conditions, are successfully reducing the deer population in designated hot spot areas in Superior close to

where people live, work, and play.

In addition to the hotspot program, the city of Superior has used regular archery hunting to limit deer numbers within relatively large blocks of unpopulated areas for many years. Hunters must obtain a free city permit and maps to participate. Regulated archery deer hunting in the City of Superior is an effective method to help reduce deer-human conflicts in a cost-efficient manner.

CWD UPDATE

With the discovery of CWD in Wisconsin, life for most hunters and deer watchers has not been the same. The effects have ranged from concern over direct effects on human health, changes in our deer management program, effects on the state wildlife budgets, and negative impacts to the private economy related to hunting and watching deer.

In 2002 hunters donated over 38,000 deer heads from across the state for CWD testing. Sampling goals were to test 500 deer from every county, or groups of counties where counties were small and/or deer harvest was low. This sample size would allow detection of CWD at the 95% confidence level if it were present in 1% or more of the population. Hunters donated enough deer heads for testing in our four counties to achieve the desired statistically significant sample size.

The good news is that no CWD positive wild deer have been found in central or northern Wisconsin. The bad news is that CWD was found in southeastern Wisconsin along the Illinois border. This was not unexpected since Illinois had found CWD in deer near the Wisconsin border. The size of the area where CWD has been found in the Dodgeville/Mount Horeb area has increased, as additional testing has been conducted.

In 2003 additional testing was conducted in several counties where sample sizes weren't large enough in 2002; and in and around the two CWD management areas in southern Wisconsin.

Testing results and information on CWD and our efforts to eliminate the disease can be found on the DNR Website at: <http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/land/wildlife/whealth/issues/cwd/>

Forest Openings

Maintenance of small grassy openings within blocks of publicly managed forestlands continues to be a high priority for wildlife habitat management. These openings provide necessary habitat for many animals such as flickers, cedar waxwings, chestnut-sided warblers, mourning warblers, broad-winged hawks, smooth green snakes, leopard frogs, badgers, bear, and they provide critical feeding area to deer after severe winters. Encroachment of trees and shrubs into forest openings is a constant threat. Maintaining forest openings helps keep this important habitat on our public forests.

The four Lake Superior Basin counties have approximately 2,000 openings on State and County Forest lands that are maintained by the DNR and County Forest Departments. Openings are maintained by a variety of methods including mowing, hand cutting, and herbicide treatment of woody vegetation.

Ashland County Forest: Openings were inspected to determine which will need maintenance in 2004.

Bayfield County Forest: A combination of hand cutting and herbicide was used to maintain 97 openings totaling 64 acres. Mowing was used to treat 42 acres in 40 openings.

Douglas County Forest: The Douglas County Forestry Department and DNR worked together to rent an ASV (tracked vehicle) with front mounted mowing deck that allowed 105 openings to be maintained by mowing. Twenty openings were maintained by hand cutting.

Brule River State Forest: An ASV was used to mow 24 openings totaling 26 acres. The ASV was able to reach these openings that were not accessible by a standard tractor and brush hog mower, thereby reducing our need to hand treat or use herbicide on these openings.



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